

# Civil Comprehension, &c.

IN A

## LETTER to a FRIEND,

From one who wishes the general Good of *England*,  
and particularly well to the Establish'd Church.

SIR,

**T**H-O' I hope I shall always endeavour to preserve that Character you give me of loving Liberty; yet you will find by what follows, how absolute an Authority I allow they shall personally have over me, who do me the Honour to admit me into their Friendships.

I am not ignorant how difficult it is when all Sides seem to be exasperated, for any Man to offer any thing acceptable; but my Intentions being to serve, and not to entertain, I shall be less concern'd at Censure.

And being as much satisfied that you wish well to *England* and all its dependent Interests, as that I shall not differ from you in those Inclinations, I shall, according to your Command, unbosome my self with all imaginable Freedom, and with as little regard as you can expect to any of the Particularities that now reign.

To begin; *Liberty of Conscience* must be a natural Right; because, \* to worship God with Sincerity of Mind, and according to our own Convictions, is a natural Duty.

The Christian Religion is so far from invading the one or superseding the other, that the Laws of the Gospel, the Principle of Love, and the Recommendations of Charity, enjoin'd by Christ, recorded by his Evangelists, and interspersed throughout the Epistles of his Apostles, very evidently confirm that indefeasible Prerogative, which our Maker hath reserved to himself, over the Souls of all Men. The Apostles did not know what Spirit they were of, and were far from being come into that of the Gospel, when they would have had fire called down from Heaven, even upon those who opposed their Master.

That Love, which is the Charakterick of the Disciples of the Meek and Merciful Jesus, does not allow us to destroy even the Enemies of God, for being so. Tho' Faith and Hope are admirable Graces, yet Charity is still greater; and without it, tho' a Man should give his Body to be burnt, rather than be a *Renegado* from Truth, yet that Religious Steadiness would

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not

\* God is not Worshipped but Affronted, unless our Hearts and Understandings accompany our Adorations.

not procure the Crown of Martyrdom, would avail nothing.

The Principle of Loving one another, and the Privilege of Serving God according to our own Discoveries, and the ultimate Results of our own Understandings, are so plainly transcribed in Holy Writ, that the contrary Opinion of the Reasonableness and Lawfulness of Persecution could never have been introduced, had not the Christian World been over-clouded by the dark times of Popery.

When the Laity were not only deny'd, but could not read, much less understand the Scriptures, it is no marvel that Persecution was introduced. The Papists of those Times lived under the entire Dominion of true and Genuine Priest-craft, they subjected themselves to, and made it a part of their Religion to take the Scriptures in the Sense, and implicitly to believe the false Comments of their Guides :

They are still too blindly govern'd by their Priests, and therefore the persecuting Principle is not at this Day so monstrous in Papists, as in those who pretend to judge for themselves, and enjoy greater Light.

Their Belief of Infallibility, and that it is impossible to be saved but within the Pale of their own Church, makes Punishment about Religious Matters, seem in the Papists, to come nearer to Compassion, to look less like Cruelty, than it can appear in Protestants, who all declare against Infallibility, and own that an honest well-meaning Man, who keeps himself in a teachable Disposition, may be saved, (tho' he runs some hazard) notwithstanding that he should not get rid of all his Errors..

And is it not wonderful, that nevertheless all the several sorts of Reform'd

Churches (none of which ever fail'd in their turns, when they were undermost, to plead for Toleration) have been, when in Prosperity and Power, guilty of Persecution.

I said, all Protestant Churches have pleaded for Toleration. To prove it, I need on one side mention only that excellent Book written by Bishop Taylor, called, *Liberty of Prophecy*. That learned Prelate was as entirely devoted to the Protestant Episcopacy of the Church of England establish'd by Law, as any Man of that Order ever was, or can be : And yet no Man can write a better Book than that which I have named on this Subject.

After that great and devotional Man, I need name no other Authors of his and our own Holy Church, upon the point of Toleration.

As for the Dissenters, there is not one sort of them, that has not written against Persecution. Indeed, their Treatises are innumerable ; and tho' many of them are indigested ones, yet they have all said and written enough to make their contrary Practices shameful.

Nay, the Papists themselves have of late Years, here in England, in Conversation, talk'd (for Writings they have none, as I know of, of that kind, under any of their Names) for Liberty of Conscience.

I would not be thought to prove, from what Papists say, that it is acknowledg'd universally to be a Right of Nature. Any thing upon this Head will come from them with an ill Grace, till they send Missionaries into Spain, into France and Germany, and all other Popish Countries, to convince those who domineer there over the Minds of Men, that they act contrary to the Rules of Common Christianity.

When

When the Papists can set aside the Inquisition in *Rome* and *Spain*, and other Places; when they have stop'd the violent Persecution in *France*, and when they have brought the Emperour to give good Terms to the *Hungarian* Protestants, they will appear fitter Advocates in the Cause of Civil and Religious Liberty. But we should not imitate the Inhumanity and Wickedness of the Papists, no not in our Treatment of that Sect itself.

And perhaps the Reason why the freer Thinkers and best natured Men amongst the *Romanists*, have not been permitted by their Church at any time, to publish any thing on this Controversy (which it is a Scandal to Human, Reasonable Nature, that it should be one) is because, tho' particulars of it have suffer'd for their Persuasion, yet the main Body of the *Roman*, have remain'd a triumphant Church, and in persecuting Circumstances.

Liberty of Conscience naturally introduceth Moderation, which Virtue hath of late by some been treated too jocularly, and by others made use of as a Cant. The Runners and Writers for the Whig and Dissenting Party, have so furiously inculcated Moderation, that they have too justly render'd themselves suspected of covering, under that specious Word, some Sinister Design.

Since Moderation is the Doctrine most Alamode, why should it only be press'd upon Church-Men? Let our Presbyterians go into *Scotland*, and Preach it to their Brethren there. But

the Presbyterians are Advocates, very moderately qualified, to maintain the Cause of Religious Liberty. They are, next to the Papists, the unsittit Propagators of it, and of all the sorts of Protestants, they are the most, and the only dangerous Enemies of our Church. They are, next to the Papists, most to be guarded against. If the Papists believe a Foreign Head, the Presbyterians think a National Church necessary, and ours Idolatrous; and, as such, have formerly co-venerated against, and pull'd \* it down.

And yet I must say, that whoever declares, he would be a Papist as soon as a Presbyterian, either knows not the Controversies betwixt the several Churches, or speaks without thinking, or is already a Papist in his Heart.

But whoever says, we are more in danger of the *Presbyterians*, than of the *Papists*, calculates according to political Arithmetick, and numbers the People of this Island.

To say the Truth, the making us extravagantly apprehensive of either Sect, is a Measure suited to the Use of Beautefeux. Our brave Protestant Troops, and our as gallant Protestant Sailors, will, under God, defend us from all the forein Assistance the Papists can get; and if we make it not the Interest of other Dissenters, the Presbyterians may wish, but can never again compals, the Destruction of our Church.

If Men had Moderation enough to come into a Civil Comprehension, neither our Church, nor our Civil

\* Men are to blame however to charge them over and above with the Murder of the King. All Histories of those times tell you of their appearing against it. We should not belie either Presbyterians or Papists, Jews or Turks, nor when they do right, search for Reasons to destroy or lessen their Merit.

Rights, nor Toleration could ever be destroy'd.

I say, a Civil Comprehension, for a Religious one is a spiritual Hodg-podg. It is an insincere Project; for where some Men give up what they believe, and others submit to what they don't believe, they, by such a sort of Agreement, make a Gallimau-fry of Religions, that is ridiculous, hypocritical, and wicked on both sides.

Certainly an Ecclesiastical Comprehension is a dishonest Design, would lose all the Spirit of our own Church, and destroy all those of the honestest part of the Dissenters, who would not, cannot be Comprehended. It is better the one should remain the Establish'd, (fenced about with all its own *meer* Spiritual Powers, over its own Subjects in Spirituals) and the other continue Tolerated Churches, and our Carriage towards both should be like what the large Souls of the Pagan *Romans* have left us an Example of. Those honest and celebrated Heathens admitted all the Gods of other Countries, enquired not into the Belief of those that were their Subjects, and yet they paid a particular Respect to their own Gods, which was their National Religion. There the National Religion was never insulted by those who differ'd from it, nor were Inquisitions set up over the Minds of their Subjects. There the Government was preserv'd by Laws against Crimes that affect Society, and not by disputable Oaths and an entire Persuasion of the Necessity of the Ceremonies, and holy Mysteries of their Establish'd Church.

A Man might there be a Stoick or an Epicurean, and yet equally in-

terested in, and capable to defend the Publick Liberty, be equally an Ornament in times of Peace, and equally a Champion in time of War.

When shall we come into these large and generous Notions? When shall we be sensible of our own Narrowness? The Dissenters might be now sensible; for the Sacramental Test, of which they complain, and which now turns upon them, was obtain'd by the great Patrons of their own Party, and was opposed by those Orthodox Bishops who were at that time most in the Interest of the Church; and the Reasons the Bishops then gave upon the Debate, were because it was a Profanation, a Prostitution, and Diminution of that most sacred Mystery of our Religion. Tricks ought never to be used, and seldom prosper. That Men may come into a more universal Spirit, I will lay before both Parties some of the Tricks that have been play'd within the Memory of most of the Men, who are now capable of making a Judgment of what is true Policy. But that I may speak within memory, I will not go farther back than the *Popish Plot*.

To say there was nothing in the *Popish Plot*, and to believe all that was sworn, seems to me equally ridiculous. I know not how far the Generality of the Papists went into that Plot, nor what it was; but I think that almost ever since the Reformation, that Sect has been so very hardly used, that it is no wonder if a great many of them have dipt into every Plot that has been set on foot by their Faction. Ill Usage will make Nature rebel both against and according to Principle. If Men are treated like Outlaws or Banditti,

Self.

Self-preservation will make 'em combine together. \*

But what Advantages did the *Whigs* make of what Mr. Coleman's Letters gave some ground for? They voted whomsoever they pleas'd, Enemies to the King and Kingdom. They were as peremptory then ( tho' the Court offer'd a good Bill of Limitations ) that nothing but the Bill of Exclusion could secure our Rights and Religion, as they say the High-Flyers are now, that nothing can preserve the Church, ( tho' other Securities may be found out ) but the Bill against Occasional Conformity. The *Whigs* then were willing that a Vote of the House of Commons should suspend Laws that were unrepeal'd; and their *Whig* House of Commons imprison'd the Subjects with a witness.

Now the *Tories* must come in for a share: They handed about Abhorrences, and after the Dissolution of the Oxford Parliament, they set on foot such Addresses, as honest Men might be ashamed of.

After this, the *Whigs* enter'd into Plots. Of the Rye-House Design, I suppose every worthy Man has an ill Opinion, but what the Noble Lord Russel, and some others of his Friends, engaged in, no Man need disclaim, who thinks Resistance in Cases not provided for, and where the Constiti-

tution is in imminent Danger, is lawful; for, upon the Disputes that were betwixt the People and Prerogative, those who were denominated *Tories* ( before that Plot ) fell in with an excessive Exercise of the indisputed Power of bringing *Quo Warranto's* against Corporations; and they went to work with every Corporation whose Election of Members the Court did not like.

This Church-Flattery the Fanaticks turn'd upon that Party about a year after King James came to the Throne; for as soon as the Indulgence was put out by that unfortunate Prince ( who was betray'd by *Passeive Pretensions*, and *Fanatick Flatteries*, as well as by false Ministers ), a great many Dissenters ( for all ought not to be charged ) regulated Cities and Boroughs, according to the power the *Tories* had thought fit, when they received their new Charters, to invest the Crown with.

At the Revolution, the Church-Party were resolved to come in play. Tho' they went backward and forward, they pretended Merit, oddly got into Places, and as awkwardly discharged 'em. They were, because they would keep themselves unsuspected of *Jacobitism*, very violent in their Administration.

But

\* In Queen Elizabeth's time, the Generality of the Papists would not ( tho' the Queen had some time before taken upon her the Headship of the Church ) join in Morton's Rebellion, but sent his Letters, and the Persons who brought them, to the Queen. Cambden p. 115.

The Bull sent by Pius Quintus against Q. Elizabeth, was disliked by the modester Papists, and contemned as a vain Crack of Words. p. 126, 127. Cambden.

A Roman-Catholick, named Bishop, ( notwithstanding all that the hot-headed Priests could say and do ) wrote soundly against Pius's Bull. Cambden page 240.

But in a short time the *Whigs* jested them out. And now, how did the *Whigs* behave themselves? How many times since the Revolution has the *Habeas Corpus* Writ (of equal date with *Magna Charta*) been suspended? How ingenious have the *Whigs* been to exclude Freeholders from Votes, to make a Party-Representative? how industrious to monopolize the Government, by framing of Oaths, which they hoped those who were for the Church of *England* would not take? tho' to shew how little Security Oaths are, those Oaths have been swallow'd almost by every body, and as many more would be swallow'd; so that by framing of Oaths from time to time, the *Whigs* and those who would be reckoned Saints, do but shew a wanton Disposition to damn their *Tory* Fellow-Subjects.

How fond were the *Whigs* of Bills of Attainder, till at last one of their own Creatures, Mr. *W——r*, was catch'd in the Snare?

Besides all this, many of the *Whigs* opposed the Triennial Bill, the Bill for Tryals in cases of High-Treason, and were for a standing Army.

I will not say that the Church-Party have been much more moderate. I wish that some Impeachments, and a great many Votes, may not be remembred to their Disreputation.

With Regret I repeat all this. I will not carry on the Detail, nor remark too severely upon these Transactions of both Parties. I don't recite them to provoke, and make the Gap wider, but to shew that the people of all sides have done enough, in their Turns, to stop each of their Mouths against one another, and

ought to pass now an Act of *real* Oblivion, and (with Reverence to the Ministry be it spoken) it is the Interest of the Queen to give an Indemnity, and the Interest both of Queen and People to come into a Civil Comprehension.

Here I must tell the *Whigs*, that if they intend Moderation, they must revoke their own severe Edicts, against those who scruple Oaths: they must make the *Quakers* Affirmation easier, than they would let it be to that people, and (tho' they have a Fondness for the present Bishops) help them in the matter of Tythes, provided that the Church has any one sufficient Remedy for the Collection of them.

These, and some other things, are what the *Whigs* ought to do on their part, by way of Accommodation: For how unreasonable soever the *Tories* think the aforemention'd Laws, they will not venture to move any thing of that nature, as a Step towards reconciling the publick Differences; because if the *Tories* stir in such things, the *Billingsgate* Writers of the *Whig* Party, who are pleas'd to take great Liberty, will, according to their Gradation of Nick-names, represent those *Tories* as High-Flyers, poishly affected, Papists, and French pensioners.

If there is room to make the Dissenters easie. If any reasonable thing is to be done in behalf of them, it is as much the Interest and Duty of those that are called *Tories*, to appear forward in settling all things upon a true Foot.

Property seems to me the natural Qualification of Trusts and Powers, and much better than any Religious Tests; Men who have good Estates, are

are their own Security ; but it will be no prejudice to Men of Honour and Reputation , if their Friends are to be their Pledges.

This sort of Qualification, and this sort of Security (which is the only true Balance ) would hinder many (especially knavish broken Tradesmen) who now get into Places, from being Competitors, and would lodge Authority in natural and sure Hands. No necessitous , no dissolute Man , would find it easie to get into Preferment. Men would be preferred, because they had a Stake, and because they were, in some Degree, elected by those who are themselves in good Circumstances.

But I would not be mistaken ; I don't here suppose that Men who are eminent in their Professions, should not be advanc'd to the Honours, and Dignities, and Recompences of those particular Professions in which they are eminent, before they have amass'd great Estates.

I have started several things, but will not take upon me to pursue them. I leave that to those who have Opportunity, and are in Power.. I desire to do no more than humbly to intimate that, if the Government expects to quiet all Parties, by making use only of one, it will be out in its reckoning.

And yet, whilst the Sacramental Test is thought a necessary Qualification, in my humble Opinion , it should not be eluded ; for, whatever it may be, it looks like Hypocrisie, and the Appearance of Hypocrisie is not to be encouraged , either by Church or State.

Till we come to settle upon the Foundation of Property, we shall be at the Mercy of Factions. The Whigs will say the Tories intend to destroy

our Civil Rights, and set up Arbitrary Power, tho' God knows, many of our Modern Whigs have deviated as much from their pretended Publick Spirit, as the Tories have from their Passive Obedience.

On the other hand the Tories will say, that the Whigs will introduce a Common-wealth, unless the Crown will tyrannize on their side : This is, and will be what they will say of one another.

But it is full time to make an end of all their Scolding on both sides, and to consider whereabouts we are. I don't determine whether it was a wise Measure to begin this War, nor will I criticize upon the Management of it ; but, since we are enter'd into the War, it's wretched Policy to continue our Feuds : If the continuance of the War is necessary, we, by Feuds, encourage the French King (to whom good English-men of no Party, whilst he hovers over every Kingdom, aspires to Universal Monarchy, and minds only his own Personal Interest, as was plain by his giving up the unfortunate King James at the Treaty of Reswick &c. can wish well) and our Feuds amongst our selves will dispirit our Allies.

If we would have Peace, we must not look as if we were in danger of Intestine Broils. That is not the way to keep our Confederates, and get good Terms for our selves ; nor to continue us, what we used to be, the Arbiters of Europe.

But another Reason why I wish our Domestick Differences were composed, is, because I would not have any thing like a Reason, like a Colour, or Pretence for a standing Army.

In the Posture we are in. Whilst all sides are so heated and inveterate.

Whilst

Whilst Reason is no longer heard, but the Incendiaries of Parties can, on every Occasion, set us together by the Ears, and put us into a Flame, it will almost seem ridiculous to continue (when the War is over) Veteran Troops, to Guard us against one another; and I must confess, I think a standing Army and Civil Liberties, are as inconsistent, as any two things in the World can be.

I believe, as well as most Men do, of this Ministry. I could enlarge upon their bright Qualities, for I must really own they have some; but I would not trust the *English* Rights with the best Set of Men in the World, if those Men can keep Arm'd Janizaries in times of Peace (with the consent of either of our strugling Parties) in Pay, to make their Will go for our Law.

And in a word, I had rather our Convulsive Humours were well disciplin'd, than have any disciplin'd Force (in time of Peace) amongst us.

Thus, at your instance, I have scribbled down some of thole Thoughts which occur to me in relation to the common Welfare of Old England; and I readily submit to your Judgment to

whom, and how far they shall be communicated. If they contribute towards taking Men off from following their Leaders too implicitly. If they make Men attend to the Expediencies and Reasons of whatever is proposed, rather than go in with it for the sake of him or them who bring it upon the stage, I shall believe my time well spent in laying these things before you. Methinks, when we have seen so many talk for and against things and Men, merely to get into Posts, we should begin to be weary of servilely running in with the Notions of any of the Demagogues of our Age, who dictate to us but for themselves, and make often a mighty Noise with what they themselves know is of no use, and are at bottom not at all concerned for.

Till we are able to withstand the Influence of Self-interested Harangues, which are Christned with the Title of *Publick Good*. Till we are emancipated from this blind Obedience, forgive me if I say that we love, and allow of, and are govern'd too by a sort of Popery in Civills, the *Domination of our State-Teachers*.

If this Freedom is not offensive, perhaps you may hear farther from

SIR

Your obedient humble Servant,

N.N

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